DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 332 CG 017 574

AUTHOR Schmaling, Karen B.; And Others
TITLE Parental Attachment, Social Support, and Current Life Situation.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (64th, Los Angeles, CA, April 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; College Students; Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; *Life Satisfaction; *Parent Child Relationship; *Socialization; *Social Support Groups

ABSTRACT

Attachment theorists argue that the nature of children's bonding with their parents has a significant impact on their adjustment throughout life, affecting ease of socialization and susceptibility to anxiety and depression. To examine the relationship between parental attachment, social support, and current life satisfaction, 251 college students (94 males, 157 females) completed the Social Support Questionnaire, the Parental Bonding Instrument, and a rating of current life satisfaction. An analysis of the results showed that lack of parental care in early life was related to socialization difficulties in adulthood. Retrospective reports of caring, socially supportive relationships early in life, were related to higher levels of adjustment in adulthood. However, the hypothesis that children with overprotecting parents would have socialization difficulties in adulthood was not supported. Fathers were rated as less caring and overprotecting than mothers. Finally, the study supported the validity of the Social Support Questionnaire. (BL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED246332

Parental Attachment, Social Support, and Current Life Situation

Karen B. Schmaling, Irwin G. Sarason, Barbara R. Sarason, & Robert B. Basham

Department of Psychology, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195

Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association Convention,

Los Angeles, CA April, 1984

CG 017574

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Karen B. Schmaling

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Parental Attachment, Social Support, and Current Life Situation

Attachment theorists argue that the nature of children's bonding with their parents has a significant impact on their adjustment throughout adult life, affecting ease of socialization, and susceptibility to anxiety and depression (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Specifically, children with secure, caring attachments to their parents are more likely to have secure relationships as adults. Conversely, socialization difficulties are thought to be the consequences of parental overprotection (Parker, 1983). Overprotection has been defined to include elements of control, intrusion, encouragement of dependence, and exclusion of outside influences.

In the present study, retrospective reports of parental care and overprotection were compared among groups of adults who differed in the number of and satisfaction with socially supportive relationships, using a rating of current life satisfaction as a correction factor. Consistent with Bowlby's theory of attachment, in the present study it was hypothesized that retrospective reports of parental care would be positively related to reports of numbers of and satisfaction with relationships in adulthood, whereas retrospective reports of parental overprotection would be inversely related to reports of numbers of and satisfaction with relationships in adulthood. Additionally, differences were examined in the reports of males and females and regarding mothers and fathers.

Method

The subjects were 94 males and 157 females in introductory psychology

classes who completed the Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ: Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983), the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI: Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979), and a rating of current life satisfaction. For this latter rating, subjects were asked to think of a ladder with 10 rungs and rate, "On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?" The rating scale ranged from 10 ("best possible life for you") to 1 ("worst possible life for you"). The PBI yields maternal and paternal care and overprotection scores. The SSQ yields scores for the number of supportive relationships (SSQN) and satisfaction with those relationships (SSQS). The subjects were divided into low, medium, and high groups based on each of their SSQ scores.

Results

3 (SSQ) x 2 (sex of subject) X 2 (parents as a repeated measure) ANOVAs were performed on the care and overprotection dependent variables, with current life satisfaction as a covariate. These analyses were repeated using SSQN and SSQS as independent variables in turn.

SSQ

There were main effects of both SSQS and SSQN for the care score, F (2,244) = 16.71, $p < .001$, and F (2,244) = 18.49, $p < .001$, respectively. Low levels of SSQS and SSQN were related to low ratings of parental care which persisted when corrected for current life satisfaction. Main effects of SSQS and SSQN were marginally significant with the inclusion of the covariate, F (2,236) = 2.76, $p < .10$, and F (2,236) = 2.47, $p < .10$, respectively. High levels of SSQS and SSQN were related to low ratings of parental overprotection which seemed to be a function of current life

satisfaction.

Parents

There were main effects for comparing mothers and fathers as a repeated measure on parental care when the subjects were grouped according to their SSQS and SSQN scores, F (1,245) = 51.68, $p < .001$, and F (1,244) = 43.83, $p < .001$, respectively. Main effects were also found for parents on the subjects' overprotection scores using both the SSQS and SSQN divisions, F (1,237) = 22.28, $p < .001$, and F (1,237) = 21.79, $p < .001$, respectively. In all cases, fathers had consistently lower care and overprotection scores than did mothers.

The cell means for the main effects of SSQ and parents are presented in Table 1 (attached).

There were no significant main effects for the sex of subject, or significant interactions for sex of subject by SSQ, or SSQ by parents. One marginally significant result was found for the sex of subjects by parents interaction for overprotection (using SSQS as the independent variable), F (1,237) = 2.90, $p < .10$. A graphic depiction of this interaction is presented in Figure 1 (attached). While the mothers were consistently rated as higher in overprotection than were fathers by both sexes, males rated fathers as being relatively lower in overprotection than did females.

The three-way interaction of SSQS, sex of subjects, and parents was marginally significant for the overprotection score, F (2,237) = 2.42, $p < .10$. The three-way interactions of SSQN, sex of subjects, and parents were marginally significant for both the care and overprotection scores, F (2,245) = 2.52, $p < .10$, and F (2,237) = 2.52, $p < .10$, respectively. Graphic depictions of these three interactions are presented in Figures 2

through 4 (attached).

Conclusions

The study supports Bowlby's (1969, 1973) theory of attachment which suggests that lack of parental care in early life is related to socialization difficulties in adulthood. Retrospective reports of caring, socially supportive relationships early in life were related to higher levels of adjustment in adulthood. The data in the present study also support the validity of the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason et al., 1983).

The complement of this hypothesis (Parker, 1983), that children with overprotecting parents are thought to have socialization difficulties in adulthood, did not find conclusive support in the present study. Retrospective reports of overprotection seem to be a function of current life satisfaction. Past studies have found social desirability to be more strongly related to reports of protection than of care (Parker, 1983). This may be a source of bias in the present study.

Finally, fathers were reliably rated as less caring and overprotecting than mothers. This is consistent with past studies on the PBI (Parker, 1983; Parker et al., 1979).

References

Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment. London: Hogarth Press.

Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger. New York: Basic Books.

Parker, G., Tupling, H., & Brown, L. B. (1979). A parental bonding instrument. British Journal of Medical Psychology, 52, 1-10.

Parker, G. (1983). Parental overprotection: A risk factor in psychosocial development. New York: Grune & Stratton.

Sarason, I. G., Levine, H. M., Basham, R. B., & Sarason, B. R. (1983). Assessing social support: The Social Support Questionnaire. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44, 127-139.

Table 1

Means of Care and Overprotection Scores by SSQ Level and by Parent

		Care	Overprotection
SSQS	Low	23.11 (86)	13.71 (75)
	Medium	25.80 (87)	11.87 (75)
	High	28.87 (87)	10.84 (84)
SSQN	Low	22.69 (87)	13.62 (87)
	Medium	27.13 (77)	11.69 (73)
	High	28.26 (87)	11.05 (83)
Parents	Fathers	24.12 (251)	11.33 (243)
	Mothers	27.73 (251)	13.27 (243)

n 's are in parentheses

Figure 1

MEANS OF OVERPROTECTION SCORES BY PARENT AND SEX OF SUBJECT

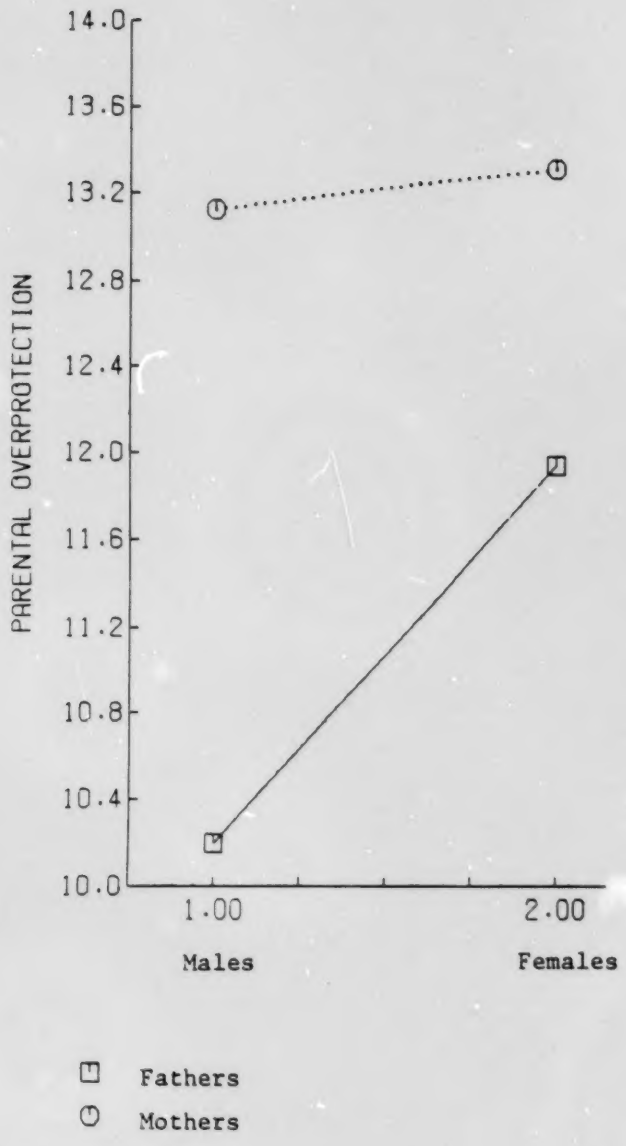
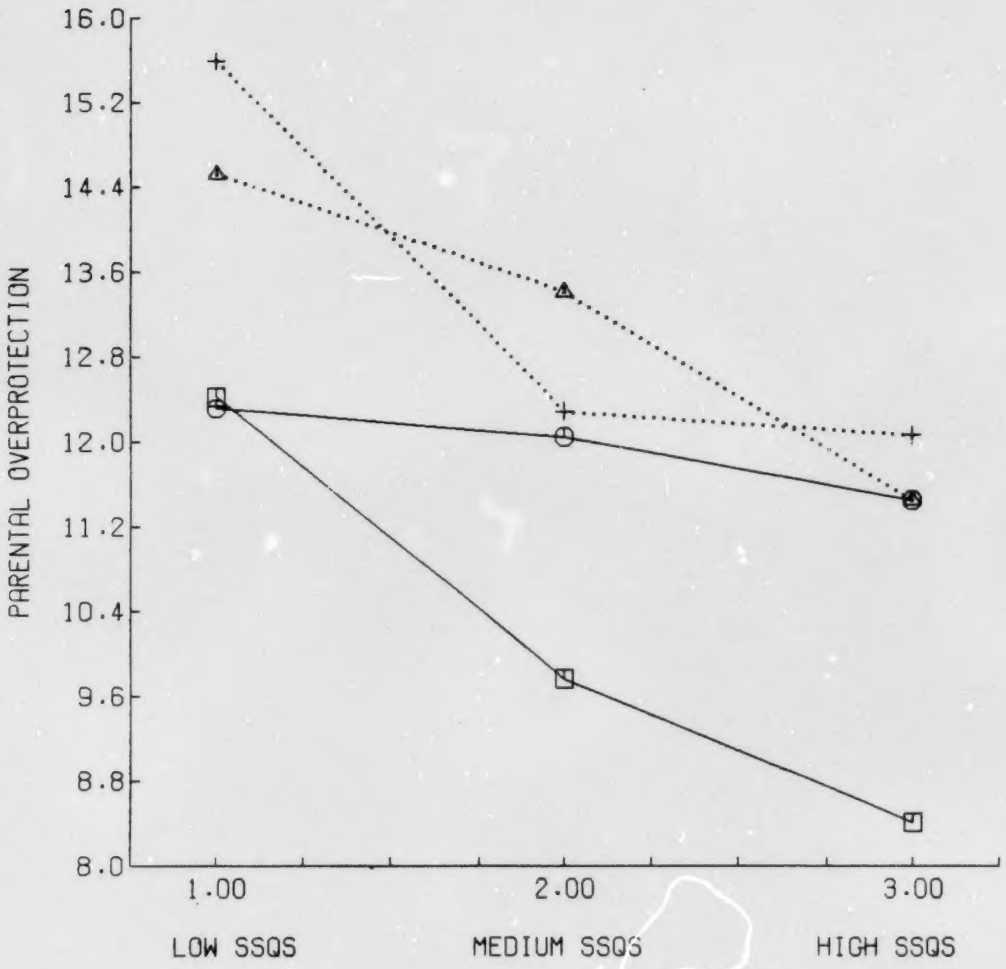


Figure 2

MEANS OF OVERPROTECTION SCORES BY SSQS, PARENT AND SEX OF SUBJECT



Fathers rated by males

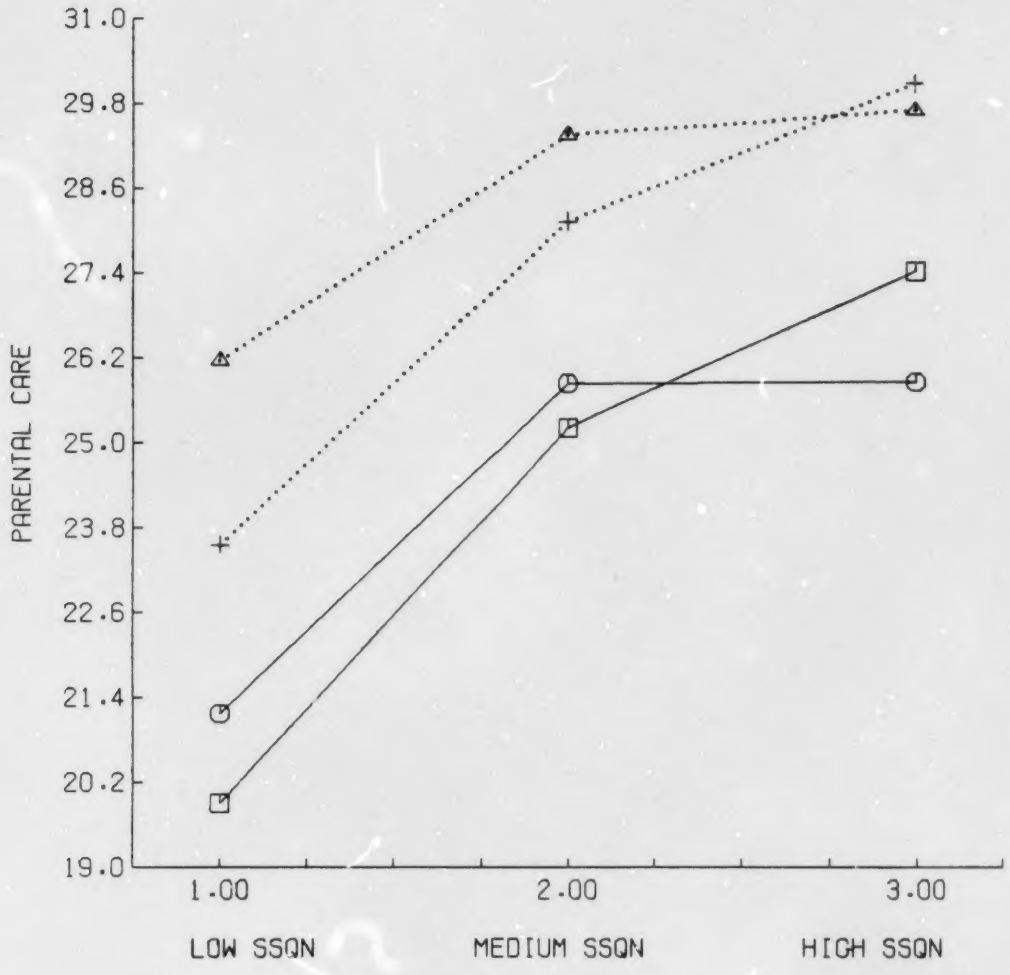
Fathers rated by females

Mothers rated by males

Mothers rated by females

Figure 3

MEANS OF CARE SCORES BY SSQN, PARENT AND SEX OF SUBJECT



Fathers rated by males

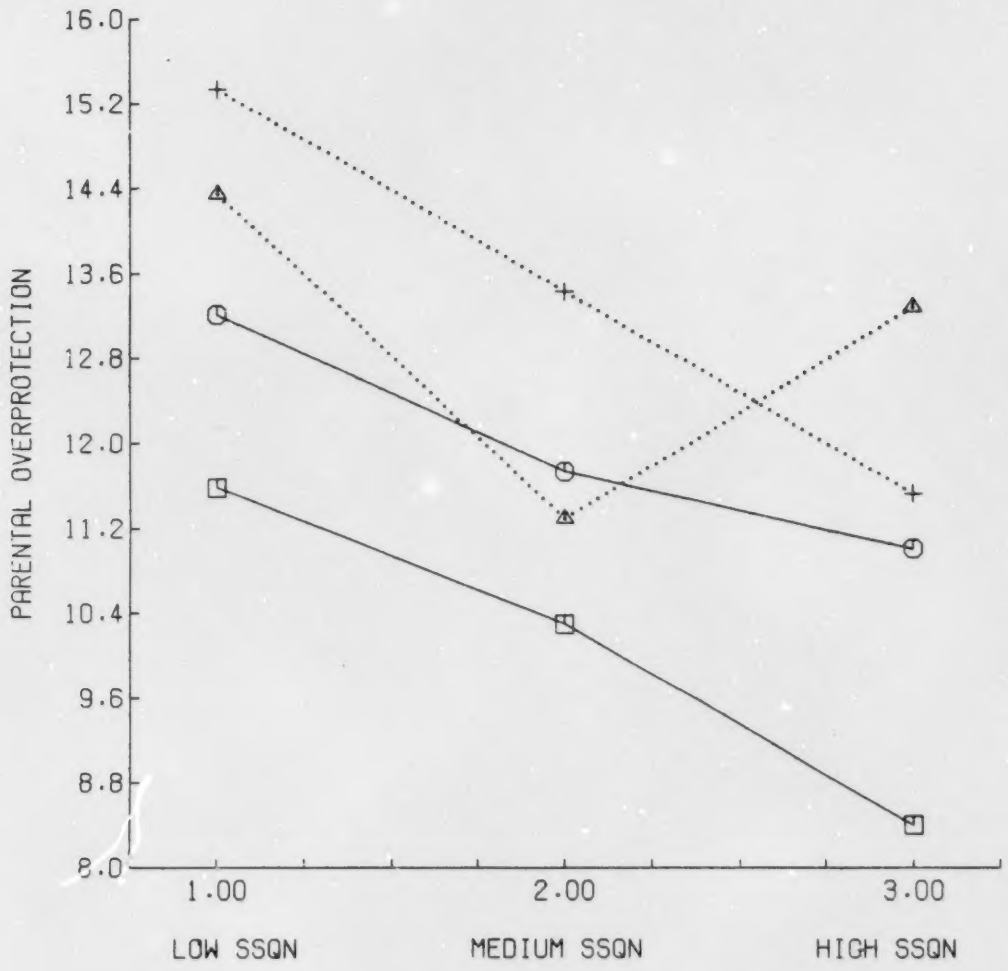
Fathers rated by females

Mothers rated by males

Mothers rated by females

Figure 4

MEANS OF OVERPROTECTION SCORES BY SSQN, PARENT AND SEX OF SUBJECT



□ Fathers rated by males

○ Fathers rated by females

△ Mothers rated by males

\+ Mothers rated by females